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## Educational policies to promote cultural diversity

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### Abstract

The paper focuses on specific applicative dimension, on the coordinates of promotion of intercultural dialogue and affirmation of cultural diversity in educational space and also on the current concerns of redefining the mission of education in the new coordinates of globalization. It is necessary to identify training needs of teachers in order to pursue educational approach in promoting cultural diversity and to highlight the possible solutions for acquiring the intercultural competence at educational beneficiaries. Promoting an educational policy for the cultural diversity determines the complexity of the process of transformation of education in acquiring intercultural attribute.

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*Keywords:* social reality; educational policies; cultural diversity; teacher; intercultural skills.

### 1. Problem Statement

Image of postmodernism in Romania is dominated by the cultural globalization which involves both a process of homogenization at the level of the national culture, and heterogeneity by cultural diversity and multiple practices, codes that have demonstrated over time resistance to any form of manifestation power by ordering and systematization. In a society that is still affected by conceptual reminiscences of the past thinking, that lead to marginalization and exclusion at social and professional level, where human resources of the educational system still struggle with their own prejudices and disadvantaged groups become an obstacle in school performance, in carrying out a dialogue between communities, it is necessary an educational policy to promote cultural diversity, intercultural

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literacy, for “a better understanding at community level and shaping an attitude of respect towards the European cultural reality and stimulating the individual participation on the level of civic society”(Cuc, C. M., 2012, pp. 97). Also, promoting an educational policy for cultural diversity leads to the decrease of problems that the educational system faces, implicitly social difficulties, contributing to the increase of the beneficial effects of revival of national and regional identity on the coordinates of value variety and multiplicity of education.

## 2. Purpose of Study

Research, practice and educational decision in Romania have made a step forward in the promotion of cultural diversity, being able to discuss of a system of education politics for cultural diversity. The motivation for this research is based on raising the general public level of pedagogical culture concerning cultural diversity, on the challenges of education that would prepare in a sustainable way in society the recognition and respect of cultural / ethnic differences, and equality of chances of the individual for the assertion in public social life.

The historical Maramures place represents the context chosen in the analytical and investigative demarche of reality of cultural diversity. Taking as reference of analysis the new paradigm of intercultural education based on the model of intercultural sensitivity development of Bennett M. J. or intercultural competence model promoted by Lustig and Koester we intend to conduct the study of historical Maramures area dominated by multi-ethnicity, but also reflexive nationalism, in which members of this community appreciate their symbols, values and institutions.

## 3. Research Methods

The management of educational policies system for cultural diversity in Romania is influenced also by the government directions of action and by the strategy and the priorities of civil society, building up a framework based on mutual respect, on understanding, communication, cooperation and tolerance necessary for assertion of diverse cultural potential. Supporting values of cultural pluralism in Romania strengthens on human rights, the provisions of the European legislative framework, and the constitutional provisions, the normative acts regarding the protection of minorities, the legislation and the associated methodology on the organization and functioning of the educational system. Thus it is set the foundation of the premise for the elaboration and implementation of educational policies to promote cultural diversity through social cohesion, the protection of minorities and consolidation of linguistic space, cultural goods and services through free access to education. In this dimension of value diversity the historical Maramures develops under the influence of a mechanism of social economic dynamics with positive influences at the level of relations between theory and practice or discursively – applicative. This investigative approach was an exercise of educational policy in the local plan, where it was found that directions of action of education as "the field of politics" (Cretu, C., 1995, pp.15) generate the image of new action models for the intercultural educational approach.

The aim of the research was to analyze the parts that directly induce direction of action of educational policy guidelines at the form and manifestation of cultural diversity as an operational value in formal and non-formal setting due to interconnections configured at the level of education for diversity and continuing education. In the investigative approach were engaged teachers, educational partners, parents.

### Research objectives:

1. Radiography existing state of things at the level of educational measures to promote cultural diversity.
2. Identifying training needs of teachers in order to pursue educational approach in promoting cultural diversity.
3. Highlighting the possible solutions advanced by the teachers for acquiring the educational beneficiaries of the intercultural competence.

The investigative demarche took into consideration the training needs of teachers in pre-university education, in terms of the management of educational policies to promote cultural diversity in a dynamic reality of the social economy, sometimes with a dialogue difficult to manage between different traditions based on different social experiences and existential conditions, adequacy of local curriculum at the cultural characteristics of students in the school community, optimizing the school-students-parents relationships based on the experiences of cultural / ethnic community groups.

*General hypothesis:* The frequency of intercultural contacts, the condition of minority/majority, but also the social and professional status determine the reaction to cultural diversity.

The demarches associated to this hypothesis assumed the convergent action of factors that aimed to develop the capacity of positive interrelation, into the framework of intercultural relations marked by ethnocentrism "(Bennett, M., 1993, quoted by Butnar, S., 2009, pp. 579) in order to increase the psycho-affective congruence between actants of intercultural communication, but also optimization of inter-knowing by promoting values, attitudes and behaviors that support cultural diversity and ethnic pluralism. The experiment was designed on the basis of the general hypothesis stated above, in terms that would allow the study of the impact of their instructional design elements being focused on explanatory models of intercultural competence training process and stages followed for developing this skill. Investigated group consisted of 80 subjects, based on simple random sampling procedures, teachers from pre-university education: teachers teaching at the preschool level (25 subjects), primary (20 subjects), gymnasium (20 subjects), high school (15) direct actants of the educational approach. We mention that these teachers were from six institutions and their related structures with cultural/ethnic diversity of school population with an educational action focused on developing intercultural competence and efficient intercultural relation systems, appropriate to daily practices.

To describe the lot of research, were taken into account: initial and continuing training, completion of psychopedagogical training programs, teaching degree obtained, age recorded in the education system and in the specialty recorded in the system, the number of years since he works in the institution. Through the interview-based survey research method there were investigated subjects opinions who preferred to answer directly to the addressed questions that aimed the approach of cultural diversity in education, but also questions based on responses to standard questions from one case to other. There were taken into consideration solutions advanced by teachers for remedying some main directions of action for the establishment of a system of educational policy for diversity, which would be characterized by unity, continuity, flexibility and globalization. In experimental research were taken into account research method of curriculum documents and other school documents, and tools, research methods used in data collection, analysis of which would verify the hypothesis and provide pertinent answers on the topic researched.

#### **4. Findings and Results**

Following the educational intervention initiated was obtained an overview of how educational policies for cultural diversity are promoted, were shaped the study results, on whose basis were structured the research findings. From this perspective the scope set in the investigation has been achieved, outlining the configuration of action directions in formal / non formal activity designed to promote cultural diversity. The research objectives were correlated with the general hypothesis which was confirmed ensuring coherence and validity to the undertaken study. The answers given by the respondents represent a criterion in the analysis and interrogative approach on the quality of teachers training from the educational system in the management of educational services for cultural diversity, and optimal educational measures for valuing cultural diversity. The results of the investigation represent a foothold for conceptualizing some interventions in educational policy efficient for developing the complex mechanism of elaboration, implementation and monitoring by decision makers at national and local level of some strategies of achieving education for cultural diversity.

The objective of this research is the opening direction of elaboration of some standards and indicators that can guide and through which can be managed the efforts of decision makers and actants to increase the quality of institutions, services, educational products for promoting cultural diversity. By reporting the information obtained during the investigation from teachers of pre-university education study results have emerged: a percentage of 74% of teachers believe that through the educational measures implemented in school institution has been built a cooperative environment between students, teachers and learners families where students cultural heritage is valued allowing them to understand students culture and to manage more efficiently the cultural/ethnic conflicts; 80% believe that the development of activities and lectures at school with parents solved conflict situations generated by the forms of inequality and discrimination which disadvantaged certain cultural groups. Mutual enrichment was an

educational measure developed by 90% of subjects interviewed through multicultural courses designed for learners, but also in non-formal activities that were based on respecting linguistic equity.

A percentage of 64% said that in the educational approach starting from core values (language, religion) cultural group developed moral and civic values of understanding, mutual respect and tolerance. Also through these interactions learners have made contact with a new way of living, with its symbolic representation, have built a self-image, and a new vision on dimension of understanding the society, the recognition and valuation of their cultural diversity. In the new social, economic and cultural dimension of historical Maramures over 90% of interviewed teachers want the development of local curriculum that can promote values, attitudes and behaviors that support cultural/ethnic diversity, due to the numerous changes, intercultural transitions, migration are required educational measures to prepare learners, but also the cultural/ethnic group for an appropriate, harmonious and balanced management of the system of interpersonal and cross-cultural relationships.

The same percentage said that in the recent years a measure to promote cultural diversity in the schools was represented by the approach of equality between cultural/ethnic groups, rather than between individuals in formal, non-formal and informal educational contexts, as a result of migration caused by poverty, disadvantaged areas or areas with a high risk of antisocial behavior. By default, these educational measures determined among learners and their families a rethinking of social/professional status at the community level and a proactive involvement, leading to a diminution of differences on the majority / minority variable.

An other educational deep aspect that supports tolerance relationships and values compatibility emphasized by 65% of the subjects is the conception and application of intervention programs for students with immigrant parents in order to improve attitudinal-affective and social behaviors of students, finding some solutions to the problems caused by the phenomenon of temporary migration in foreign countries with a macro-level impact, but on the alternative micro level, on the family nucleus. From the answers of respondents it was confirmed that it is necessary a diversification of continuing training addressed to this issue according to several criteria: continuing education programs focused on the analysis and motivation of differences between cultural/ethnic groups in order to diminish differences and ignorance; programs that aim the elaboration of multicultural curriculum based on the study of cultures, historical and social experiences, but also the social and cultural contributions brought by them to the society. Also through continuing education programs, teachers have requested to carry out some training courses in formation of cultural style involved in educative activity, necessary for understanding the ethnicity particularities but also to the formation of linguistic abilities, attitudes, skills, necessary for an efficient management of intercultural interaction.

Through the semi-standardized interview we appreciate that the information obtained was a real support for the improvement of continuing training activity of teachers in promoting cultural diversity and forming intercultural competence, in accordance with the provisions of Final Statement 10th Council of Europe Conference of Ministers of Culture, 2013 „ Stress the importance of access to culture and participation in cultural life for enhancing democratic citizenship and social cohesion, and as a significant factor for cultural diversity, cultural exchange and dialogue” (\*\*\*, 2013).

It was found that the elaboration of systematic, comprehensive and continuing training programs of development of human resources for cultural diversity are still a poor form, with a small number of specialists in this field and the lack of some financial resources for workshops, conferences organized on education for cultural diversity in the country and abroad, and fees for participation in specialized courses in this field difficult to honor influence the development of specific strategies and methodological creativity of teachers involved in education for cultural diversity. The answers given by the respondents revealed also advanced solutions for acquiring intercultural competence by the educational beneficiaries: a percentage of 78% claim the frequency of interactions with members of another culture (ukrainian, hungarian, german, gypsy), aspect that contributes to the formation of relational behavior at manifestation of the respect to others through verbal and nonverbal symbols, and decisions conjugated and applied in collaboration led to the minimization of differences on variable majority/minority. The same percentage emphasized that through the promoted educational measures was achieved an adaptation of learners to the multicultural environment, being able to act in an ethno-relative way, which over time led to significant changes at the level of social and professional status, which reduced resistance to cultural diversity; 85% of teachers support orientation of learners to the appropriate knowledge of intercultural competence that opens their horizon to overcome the borders of their own cultural environment, developing them a system of moral and ethical norms that

can support them to understand people of other cultures and their behaviors, events and beliefs that define cultural group. The same percentage in formal, non-formal activity for acquisition by the educational beneficiaries of the intercultural competence brought as an argument the development of tolerance to ambiguity, adaptation to environmental changes determined by the change of cultural environment, empathy, and use in the evaluation procedure of student reflection on cultural/ethnic experiences of groups of belonging, which will help to understand all historical and social experiences of cultural/ethnic community groups. All these data argue that Romanian education system needs reform and renewal processes, promulgated by the directions of innovation "(Lecoite, M., 2001 quoted Cucuș, C., 2009, pp.17) in order to build a system of educational policy for a unitary, flexible diversity as a result of social globalization being in agreement with the directions of cultural and educational policy promoted by the EU, because „Increasing international competitiveness requires high professional skills combined with an ability to create, innovate and work in multicultural and multilingual environments” (\*\*\*, 2010).

## 5. Conclusions

This study establishes the center of gravity of educational policy for cultural diversity, emphasizing the need for the abolition of cultural delimitations in Romania, the construction of a multilingual space based on respect for cultural identity. Balancing this center of gravity, educational policy will become punctual, being separated by beliefs, misunderstandings, prejudices or ideological controversies leading to cultural/ethnic freedom of expression in the new perspective of regionalization, where the individual in the process of developing forms a global competence by harmonizing ethnic, national and global identities. The new direction of education should support the promotion of cultural diversity by elaborating a multicultural curriculum based on respect of rights and cultural norms of the group, the cultural patterns of behavior, the experience of social relations, the regional and local community resources, and the experiential learning model.

Respecting and valuating cultural diversity in school leads to a better integration of the cultural heritage in the EU cultural space as a vector of values, which facilitates cultural exchanges, because “it is teachers’ duty...to bring a major contribution in communities in which we interact, to act ethically... to make ourselves and other citizens becoming global, who share a particular sensitivity towards the diversity of individuals, nations and present cultures.”(Velea, A. L. M., 2012, pp. 257)

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